



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Health Department Promotes HIV Testing



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BURLINGTON – June 27 is National HIV Testing Day. The Vermont Department of Health reminds Vermonters to get tested for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Nationally, about 16 percent of people living with the virus don't know that they have it according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It can take about 11 years from the point of infection before identifiable symptoms of HIV infection present themselves.

“While there is no cure for HIV, there are medications available to treat the condition,” said Patsy Kelso, state epidemiologist for infectious disease. “Treatment can improve health and prolong life – and it can reduce the amount of virus in the bloodstream which can greatly reduce your chance of spreading HIV to others.”

Most people should be tested for HIV at least once as part of their routine health care. People at higher risk should get tested every year. People at high risk include injection-drug users and their sex partners, persons who exchange sex for money or drugs, sex partners of people who are HIV-infected, and men who have sex with men or heterosexuals who have had multiple sex partners since their most recent HIV test. According to CDC, most people who learn that they have HIV will change their behavior to avoid infecting others. Entering care and adherence to medication regimens can protect the health of people with HIV and their partners.

Being unaware of one's HIV infection increases the risk of unknowingly transmitting the virus to others. “Getting tested for HIV provides valuable information that can help stop its spread,” said Kelso. “When people find out that they have the virus they can take action to prevent passing it on to others.”

People who test with their medical provider can have a blood test or an oral fluid (swab) test. Individuals at high risk, who may not be comfortable asking their provider for a test, may choose to visit one of nearly 30 testing locations sponsored by the Health Department statewide. These sites provide free and anonymous testing services. The Health Department network sites offer oral fluid testing, HIV risk reduction counseling and links to support or care services as needed.

HIV is spread primarily through unprotected sex and sharing injection equipment. Consistent and correct use of condoms can greatly reduce the risk of sexual transmission. Never sharing syringes prevents transmission of the virus. A mother with HIV can pass the virus to her baby, although early diagnosis and medical care can greatly reduce this risk. The Health Department recommends that all pregnant women seek prenatal care and ask their medical provider for the HIV test.

For more information, go to www.11years.org or www.gettestedvermont.org or call the Health Department's toll-free AIDS Hotline at 800-882-2437 weekdays 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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